

SOCIAL MEDIA

TikTok ban could cost more than money for creators

The social media platform has provided community and an easy way to share information, Pennsylvania content creators say.

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TikTok is used by more than 170 million Americans. The social media platform, known for its short, trendy videos, has enabled many of those users to become a part of the world of content creation, allowing them to establish communities and make money through the app.

There's a chance those videos — at least on this platform — could be going away.

In March, the U.S. House passed a measure that would mandate TikTok's Beijing-based parent company, ByteDance, to sell its stake in the platform within six months or face a nationwide ban.

Lawmakers' primary concern is the potential for the Chinese government to use TikTok to spy on U.S. elections and what they could do with American users' data.

Initiatives like the creator rewards program, sponsorships and a growing need for a social media presence across multiple platforms are things content creators must take into consideration. Over the past few years, TikTok has gained popularity and users continue to flock to the app.

TikTok and other social media platforms have become a main source of income of some content creators, including Amanda Matta.

Matta, who lives in Harrisburg, has gained more than 1.5 million followers on TikTok by recording videos about the royal family. Matta says she has always considered the inconsistency of social media, but still feels as though TikTok is one of the best for sharing and engaging with information.

"TikTok, to me, is one of the most successful ways to disseminate information," Matta said. "Yeah, I'm concerned about our attention spans, but the younger generation needs that fast and quick information. It's valuable and it's a great tool to get information out there."

Matta said she only has a large following because of her TikTok videos and feels like the government's stance on the app is "being overblown." She said TikTok isn't the only app that collects user data.

"I don't think it's just China," she said. "The U.S. does it, too, social media does it. It is possible to use TikTok without adding too much personal data. It's not much different from the same ads you see on Instagram or Facebook."

Matta hopes her large following will move across platforms with her if TikTok were to be banned and hopes that she would be able to continue her content on Instagram. A change like that could give her more time to focus on other outlets, such as her Substack articles and art history podcast.

Philadelphia native content creator Cierra Williams has unintentionally created a community for young Black women by simply opening the TikTok app and being herself. Williams has over 100,000 followers on TikTok, creating content based around funny life stories and exploring her home city.

"I'm just being me. Sometimes I don't want to show you all where to go," Williams said. "I want to gatekeep. I'm not going to be out partying every weekend; that's not me. I'm just going to show you all what it's like to be from (Philadelphia) and living here."

Williams does content creation in addition to working as a marketing manager in Philadelphia and says she enjoys the extra income, but she said the app has provided way more than just money for her.

"The income is as consistent as you are," Williams said. "Obviously, people should create content because they love it, but it's important to me because I feel as though I have a real community of people who, even when I meet people in real life, it's always really cool because it's not that every single person that follows me is gonna be exactly like me. But I can see similarities and myself like 'Oh, OK, we could be friends.'"

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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